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- ART. II.—1. *The Works of THOMAS GRAY ; containing his Poems, and Correspondence with several eminent Literary Characters. To which are added, Memoirs of his Life and Writings, by W. MASON, M. A.* The Third Edition, carefully corrected. In two volumes. London. 1807. pp. 316, 324.
2. *The Works of THOMAS GRAY, with Memoirs of his Life and Writings, by WILLIAM MASON. To which are subjoined Extracts, Philological, Poetical, and Critical, from the Author's Original Manuscripts. Selected and Arranged by THOMAS JAMES MATHIAS.* In two volumes. London. 1814. pp. 581, 634.
3. *The Works of THOMAS GRAY.* Vol. I. *Containing the Poems, with Critical Notes ; a Life of the Author ; and an Essay on his Poetry.* By the REV. JOHN MITFORD. Vol. II. *Containing the Letters ; with Important Additions and Corrections from his own Manuscripts.* Selected and Edited by REV. JOHN MITFORD. London. 1816. pp. clxxvi., 242, 586.
4. *The Works of THOMAS GRAY.* Edited by the REV. JOHN MITFORD. 5 vols. London : William Pickering. 1835—1843.
5. *The Correspondence of THOMAS GRAY and WILLIAM MASON, to which are added some Letters addressed by GRAY to the Rev. James Brown, D. D., Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge. With Notes and Illustrations by the REV. JOHN MITFORD, Vicar of Benhall.* London : Richard Bentley. 1853. pp. xxxviii., 485.
6. *The Poetical Works of THOMAS GRAY. Edited, with a Life, by REV. JOHN MITFORD.* Boston : Little, Brown, & Co. pp. cxviii., 223.
7. *A Fac-simile of the Original Autograph Manuscript of GRAY'S Elegy. Photographed by MESSRS. CUNDALL, DOWNES, & Co.* London : Sampson Low, Son, & Co. 1862.

It is proposed, in this article, to take account of the poet whose name we have placed at its head. We shall look to see what manner of man he was ; what were his mental powers and moral traits ; how he lived, and thought, and wrote ; what

he studied, and what was his place among the scholars of his time; what was the character of his poetry, and what his rank among poets; and, finally, what has been the general result to mankind of the fact that Thomas Gray — man, poet, scholar — once lived, and run his race in the world. We at first proposed, for the sake of greater convenience and distinctness, to arrange our remarks under a threefold division, considering separately the life, the poetry, and the scholarship of our author; but the elements were so mixed in him that such a division would be difficult and embarrassing. His life was his learning. The man was a poetical scholar, and a scholarly poet. His poetry twined itself around his learning, and was saturated by it. He planted himself in bookish soil, and flowered at last into verse. We shall therefore not attempt to mark out the divisions indicated above, but shall follow an arrangement mainly chronological. Of course, at this late day, we cannot hope to present new views, or to throw new light on the character and writings of our author. There are no recently discovered documents, — no Archives of Simancas have been unearthed, after the flight of years, for a newer and truer illustration of an old subject. Time has given its verdict, which is substantially correct. We have nothing to say which will impugn its truth. Our aim will be, after a very careful study of all the remaining documents, to illustrate freely, by frequent references, our views of their writer; and also to bring together whatever in later literature has an important bearing on the subject before us. We shall hope thus not only to present the completest criticism of our author, but also to give, as it were, the best bibliography of his writings.

And first, a word or two, by way of introduction, upon some of the different editors and editions which we have placed at the head of this article. All editions of Gray are necessarily founded upon the labors of his first editor, Mason. Mason was, during the life of Gray, a warm personal friend, a brother poet, of similar tastes and kindred pursuits, one well fitted in every way to appreciate both the character and the literary productions of his friend. The office of literary executor, which devolved upon him, was in the main faithfully discharged; and we owe to him the greater part of what knowl-

edge we have of the life of Gray. Later biographers have added illustrations from other sources, and but little else. Of all the editions of Gray, our own favorite is that of Mathias, numbered second on our list. Mathias was a man of fine taste, good scholarship, and sound judgment, having also the congenial enthusiasm for his subject which is necessary to a good editor hardly less than to a good biographer. His edition is in two comfortable quartos, very scholarly in appearance. The portrait forming the frontispiece to the first volume is the most satisfactory to us of all that we have ever seen, being quite different from the common emasculated likenesses. It is engraved from the original portrait in the possession of the Masters and Fellows of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. The first volume embraces all that appeared in Mason's edition, which is substantially what all subsequent editions have contained, with the exception of a few more letters, or a new Life substituted for Mason's. The second volume contains what can be found nowhere else,—a mass of material which is indispensable to any one who would wish to understand the nature and extent of Gray's learning. It consists of copious extracts from original manuscripts left by Gray to Mason, which finally fell to the Masters and Fellows of Pembroke Hall, and were by them intrusted to Mathias to edit. Here we have essays and criticisms, prolusions and prelections, mostly fragmentary, on widely various subjects; the fine thoughts of a poet on poetry, histories begun but never finished, translations, scraps on architecture, heraldry, philosophy, and the different branches of natural history, ideas on art, and subtile textual criticisms not surpassed by the nice scholarship of our own day. But there is nothing loose or superficial. Everything exhibits his large and thorough learning.

Mitford, another editor, has done more than any later scholar towards illustrating his subject. He has edited several editions of parts of the poet's works, has contributed many critical notes, has collated very industriously parallel passages from various authors, and has written what is, perhaps, the best Life of Gray. In the Advertisement prefixed to the third work on our list, in speaking of Mason's edition of the Letters, he censured him severely for the liberties he had taken in

altering, omitting, and transposing passages, besides inserting sentences of his own. It is undeniable that Mason did make certain changes of the kind indicated, but not to a great extent, and hardly in a way to be of injury. We have compared very carefully all the letters given by the two editors, supposing, of course, that Mitford, assuming high moral ground, would take care to be always accurate in his charges of inaccuracy; but we were mistaken. We have now before us quite a list of charges of garbling made against Mason, without any foundation whatever. Letters which he had given in full were represented to be either omitted or given in part. It is true, however, that Mitford's collection of the Letters is not only more complete, but also more correct, than that of Mason.

The Aldine edition of Gray's Works, in five volumes, is more convenient and readable than any other, and has been proportionally popular. It contains a larger number of the inimitable letters than any other collection, including all which have been published, with the exception of those comprised in a later volume of correspondence, issued in 1853. This latter work is fifth on our list. The American edition—the sixth on our list—forms one volume in that most excellent and comely edition of the British Poets, for which the reading public is so largely indebted to Messrs. Little, Brown, and Company. It follows, at no disadvantage, the first volume of the Aldine collection. In fact, we prefer the American Aldine every way,—on æsthetical as well as on patriotic grounds. To our eyes it is *matre pulchra filia pulchrior*. We wish that the publishers might deepen our obligation, and complete their edition, by giving us also the four volumes of Letters. They are still fresh and beautiful; and classics they will always be. We hardly know where to turn for anything more charming in sentiment or more graceful in style. So good a judge as Cowper thought Gray's works sublime, and liked his letters better than those of Swift, which he once regarded as the best that could be written.

Thomas Gray, like Chaucer, Ben Jonson, Milton, and Cowley, was a Londoner by birth. He could hardly be called, however, like Samuel Johnson, a Londoner by conviction. He was the son of a money-scrivener in Cornhill, and first

saw the light on the 26th of December, 1716. Of his early life we know little; but we may well suppose him, even in boyhood, to have been uniformly quiet and studious. To his father he owed little; to his mother, almost everything. By her own limited means he was maintained and educated at Eton, being under the charge, while there, of his uncle, Mr. Antrobus. Two of his fellow-scholars were Richard West and Horace Walpole, with both of whom he was on terms of intimacy. His friendship with West burned bright for eight years, when it was extinguished by the untimely death of the latter. West was a person well fitted for warm friendship with Gray. His taste was refined, his love of learning great, and his acquirements were thought extraordinary in one so young. The temperament of the two friends was the same, and their habits and tastes very similar. We must always regret West's early loss; for we cannot doubt that, if he had lived, the influence of his friendship and sympathy would have been most healthful and happy, both for Gray's life and for his writings. His life would have been less morbid, — not less literary, but more human, with larger reach and more social expression. In friendly counsel and appreciative criticism, as well as in the generous rivalry of a long-known and congenial companion, he would have found — what he too much lacked in his somewhat solitary life — an object in study and an incentive to write. The gentle stimulus might have made him not less a scholar, and more an author. Adam Smith might never have written that "Gray joins to the sublimity of Milton the elegance and harmony of Pope; and nothing is wanting to render him, perhaps, the first poet in the English language, but to have written a little more."

From Eton, Gray was transferred in 1734 to Peter-House at Cambridge, Walpole being at King's College, and West at Christ Church, Oxford. Here Gray's life, properly speaking, may be said to begin; for he led the life of a student, and his home was thenceforward within the walls of a University. Few persons lead lives so barren of incident as was his. Seldom does biography deal with details so unvarying. The most prominent events in his career were his difference with,

and separation from, Walpole, while on their travels; and his removal, after twenty years' residence, from Peter-House to Pembroke-Hall, on account of the pranks which certain roguish students inconsiderately played upon him. An occasional visit; a tour in Scotland; the publication of a poem or two; the delving in new mines of knowledge; a short essay, a careful commentary on some standard author, a scholarly examination of the principles of some branch of art, or an historical view of some period of literature; the claims of a somewhat varied correspondence; the fortunes of friends; the offer and refusal of the Poet-Laureateship, and of the degree of Doctor of Laws; the election to the chair of Modern History at Cambridge;—such incidents as these formed the chief ripples in the placid current of his life. There was nothing of excitement in the man himself, or in his experience. He was by nature fitted for cloistered quiet, and fortune aided nature. With him, therefore, more than with most authors, the everyday facts are of little worth, and the chief records of the man are to be found in his writings and studies.

At Cambridge Gray remained four years,—till 1738. His character, his tastes, and his habits were much the same as in his maturer years. With him, emphatically, the child was father of the man. He quietly and steadily employed himself with his studies and a few friends. He devoted himself chiefly to the classics, filled many hours with French and Italian, dabbled somewhat in history and philosophy, and showed no favor whatever to mathematics. The latter was the only important branch of learning to which he through life retained an aversion, and in which he never made progress. Nicholls, in his *Reminiscences of Gray*, states—what to us seems improbable, as being inconsistent with Gray's recorded views—that he afterwards regretted his want of mathematical knowledge. He never valued the science for itself; and, as a discipline of the attention and of the reasoning powers, he always argued that it was not necessary,—that metaphysics, or any works of close and deep reasoning, would serve quite as well. His views and reasons seem to have been similar to those of Warburton, and to those to which Gibbon, at a later period, gave vent in his *Autobiography*. In the discussion which

took place some years ago, as to the claims of mathematics, Gray would have sided with Whewell, and not with Babbage.

While at college, he wrote Latin verses on various subjects ; made translations from Latin and Italian into English and Latin ; and commenced the correspondence which furnished the recreation of a lifetime, and which has been, and will be, the delight of unnumbered thousands. His first attempt in English verse is believed to have been a translation, of about one hundred and ten lines in length, of a passage from the *Thebaid* of Statius. This was at the age of twenty, showing that Gray was not one of those precocious sons of the Muses who lisp in numbers from early childhood. Only a fragment of this version is included in the later editions of his works ; but the whole might very properly be admitted, both on account of its intrinsic merit, and of the interest naturally felt in a poet's first production. Mason thought that he could perceive in it indications that Gray had already imbibed much of Dryden's spirited manner. His early preference of Dryden he retained through life, valuing his prose hardly less than his poetry, and always listening with impatience to any unfavorable criticism of his works. When Dr. Beattie, in conversing about Dryden, seemed somewhat backward in appreciating his merits, Gray told him, "that, if there was any excellence in his own numbers, he had learned it wholly from that great poet ; and pressed him with great earnestness to study him, as his choice of words and versification was singularly happy and harmonious." Mason thought that he admired Dryden almost beyond bounds.

After leaving College, Gray, in company with his friend Walpole, started, in 1739, on the grand tour, and remained abroad about two years and a half. Their course was through France, Switzerland, and the North of Italy, to Florence, where they passed the winter and early spring. They then went to Rome, took a short trip to Naples, and visited *Herculaneum*, which had then just been discovered. Walpole, in a letter to West at Oxford, and Gray, in a letter to his mother of June 17, 1740, distinctly allude to this buried city, and to the excavations commenced in the previous year by his Sicilian Majesty. Returning, they remained for nearly a year



at Florence. During his travels Gray was by no means idle. His tastes were omnivorous, and his studies unremitted. The abundant remains of antiquity, the masterpieces of architecture, sculpture, and painting, the beauties of natural scenery, the study of French and Italian, the perusal of the ancient Latin authors in connection with the scenes of their labors, and shrewd observations on the life and manners of the modern inhabitants of the countries he visited, — all these alike occupied and interested him. He was familiar with the works of preceding tourists, and frequently refers us to the pages of Sandys and others, — the standard travellers of that day. He wrote often to his family and to West descriptions of parts of his journey, and filled a copious journal with criticisms, sketches of scenery, and the like ; but he left behind him no connected account of his tour. The humor, fancy, erudition, and narrative power exhibited in the fragments we have, lead us to wish that they were more. Addison's account of his Tour was at that time considered the perfection of scholarly travel. It seems to us now quite frigid and antiquated. Gray, we think, would have far surpassed him in the judgment both of his own and of subsequent generations, — at least, if he had written in an epistolary form, in which he was *facile princeps*. We should have seen the scholar no less, and the man much more, with far more of delicate fancy, easy grace of manner, quiet touches of humor, and sportive raillery. For ourselves, we can hardly call to mind any English author whom we should have preferred as a traveller. His warm appreciation of Nature in her sterner and sublimer aspects appears in his famous description of the Grande Chartreuse, — a wild mountain-monastery in the midst of lofty Alpine scenery. So much did it fascinate him, that he turned aside to visit it a second time, and a second time he enthusiastically poured out in his letters the sublime emotions with which it filled his soul. An Alcaic Ode — perhaps his most finished specimen of Latin verse — was inspired by the genius of the place, and written in the album of the monastery. His account of the ascent and descent of Mount Cenis is graceful and spirited. His love of scenes of more gentle beauty is manifested in his description of the many attractions of Naples,

in his letter to West recounting his delight in Frascati and Tivoli, which he still further embodies in a beautiful Latin ode, also forwarded to his friend at Oxford. Many other fragments and hints remain, to show that his love of nature was not less than his love of books. His zeal and spirit as a traveller might be very well described in the words which he himself employed, in a letter to his friend Dr. Wharton, in 1758, to show the nature of his antiquarian studies : —

“The drift of my present studies is to know, wherever I am, what lies within reach, that may be worth seeing, whether it be building, ruin, park, garden, prospect, picture, or monument, — to whom it does or has belonged, and what has been the characteristic and taste of different ages. You will say this is the object of all antiquaries. But pray, what antiquary ever saw these objects in the same light, or desired to know them for a like reason?”

Besides the two Odes already mentioned, Gray wrote, during his absence from England, several short pieces and fragments in Latin verse, among which were a Fragment of a Latin Poem on the Gaurus, and a few lines of a Farewell to Florence. He also commenced at Florence, in 1739, a didactic poem in Latin hexameters, entitled “*De Principiis Cogitandi*,” which was never finished. Sending it to West, he styles it the beginning, “not of an epic poem, but of a metaphysic one.” There remain some two hundred lines of the first book, and about thirty of the fourth. If completed, it would have added nothing to the fame of Gray. His Muse was anything but didactic by nature.

Later in life, he writes to his friend Mr. Palgrave, in 1765, certain brief rules to be observed in travelling, which we cannot forbear to quote, on account of the good sense and useful hints to tourists contained in them. The fifth rule, in particular, has been often quoted.

“1. *Vide quodcunque videndum est.* 2. *Quodcunque ego non vidi, id tu vide.* 3. *Quodcunque videris, scribe et describe; memoriæ ne fide.* 4. *Scribendo nil admirare; et cum pictor non sis, verbis omnia depinge.* 5. *Tritum viatorum compitum calca, et cum poteris desere.* 6. *Eme quodcunque emendum est:* I do not mean pictures, medals, gems, drawings, &c. only; but clothes, stockings, shoes, handkerchiefs, little movables; everything you may want all your life long: but have a care of the custom-house.”

After their second visit to Florence, while on their homeward journey, Gray and Walpole had an unfortunate disagreement, which caused them to separate. The trouble arose at Reggio, in April, 1741. There must have been much hard feeling between them, as they were never again on terms of intimacy with each other, though previously they had been so — at least in name and appearance — for several years. The rupture was undoubtedly due indirectly to their general incompatibility of character, habits, taste, and temper. The immediate occasion of their difference is not fully known. It was known to Mason, a firm friend of Gray, his literary executor, and earliest biographer; but he does not state it, as Walpole was still living. He remarked, however, to Nicholls, author of the *Reminiscences of Gray*, “that it was more surprising that two persons of characters so opposite to each other should ever have agreed, than that they should finally have separated.” Nicholls himself says: —

“When I once endeavored to learn from him [Gray] the cause of his difference with, and separation from, Walpole, he said, ‘Walpole was son of the first minister, and you may easily conceive that, on this account, he might assume an air of superiority,’ (I will not answer for the *exact expression*, but it was to this effect,) ‘or do or say something which perhaps I did not bear as well as I might.’ This was all I ever heard from him on the subject, but it is instead of a volume to those who know the independent and lofty spirit of Gray.”

Walpole was always willing to acknowledge his share of blame for their misunderstanding. In a letter to Mason, written in 1773, he states the case quite frankly: —

“I am conscious that, in the beginning of the differences between Gray and me, the fault was mine. I was young, too fond of my own diversions, nay, I do not doubt, too much intoxicated by indulgence, vanity, and the insolence of my situation as a prime minister’s son, not to have been inattentive to the feelings of one, I blush to say it, that I knew was obliged to me, — of one whom presumption and folly made me deem not very superior in parts, though I have since felt my infinite inferiority to him. I treated him insolently. He loved me, and I did not think he did. I reproached him with the difference between us, when he acted from the conviction of knowing that he was my superior. I often disregarded his wish of seeing places, which I would not quit

my own amusements to visit, though I offered to send him thither without me. Forgive me if I say that his temper was not conciliating, at the same time that I confess to you, that he acted a more friendly part, had I had the sense to take advantage of it. He freely told me my faults. I declared I did not desire to hear them, nor would correct them. You will not wonder that, with the dignity of his spirit, and the obstinate carelessness of mine, the breach must have widened till we became incompatible."

Mason had the same opinion as to the general unfitness of the two for friendship and sympathy with each other. He speaks of the disagreement between them as " arising from the difference of their tempers. The former [Gray] being, from his earliest years, curious, pensive, and philosophical ; the latter [Walpole] gay, lively, and consequently inconsiderate ; this, therefore, occasioned their separation at Reggio."

Mr. Isaac Reed, in a manuscript note to Wakefield's *Life of Gray*, gives the only statement we have seen of the immediate cause of the rupture between Gray and Walpole. The statement, however, is not on his own authority, but based on a communication made to him by a third party whom he deemed worthy of reliance. The note referred to is as follows : " Mr. Roberts, of the Pell-Office, who was likely to be well informed, told me at Mr. Deacon's, 19th April, 1799, that the quarrel between Gray and Walpole was occasioned by a suspicion Mr. Walpole entertained, that Mr. Gray had spoken ill of him to some friends in England. To ascertain this, he clandestinely opened a letter, and resealed it, which Mr. Gray with great propriety resented ; there seems to have been but little cordiality afterwards between them." Whether this alleged cause of separation was the true one cannot now be known. It seems not improbable, and is, at any rate, consistent with Walpole's acknowledgment that he was in fault in the matter. Though a reconciliation took place in 1744, by the mediation of a common friend, it was, as Mitford remarks, as far at least as Gray was concerned, " rather an act of civility and good manners than the re-establishment of a cordial and sincere attachment." It was the meeting of literary acquaintances, not the union of congenial friends. For many years they exchanged letters from time to time, informed each other of their schemes and

labors, and occasionally met. At these meetings literary chit-chat formed the staple of their intercourse, unrelieved by the expression of any warm personal attachment. They must have been dreary reunions indeed, if all were similar to the meeting which Nicholls describes. He says: "Mr. Walpole once invited Gray the poet, and Hogarth, to dine with him, but what with the reserve of the one, and a want of colloquial talents in the other, he never passed a duller time than between those representatives of Tragedy and Comedy; being obliged to rely entirely on his own efforts to support conversation."

After leaving Walpole at Reggio, Gray proceeded on his homeward journey, visiting Venice, Milan, and other cities in the North of Italy. We have no letters remaining to enable us to know the impressions which this part of his tour made upon him. It is greatly to be regretted that we have no description of Venice from his pen. That city, so fascinating to the traveller by its beauty, its treasures of art, and its glorious memories, must surely have aroused within him profound enthusiasm. His stay, however, was brief. Turning aside from the direct route to have another look at the Grande Chartreuse, he went leisurely on through France, and arrived in England in September, 1741.

Gray had now nearly completed his twenty-fifth year, and it seemed high time to look about him. The question presented itself, what to do. How should he settle himself in life? He was a cultivated, travelled young gentleman, of scholarly habits, refined tastes, and some acquaintance with good society. Like Ovid, Petrarch, Tasso, and Cowper, besides many other great names in ancient and modern poetry, he had at first an eye to the law as his profession. But his devotion to it was even less than that of any of those sons of the Muses whom we have named. His intention, if it was ever seriously entertained, was yet never more than a mere intention. He never received a "call"; never "ate his terms"; never fairly entered even into the preliminary studies. The means of his family, always limited, had been still further reduced by the mismanagement of his father, — a man who seems through life to have blended in some sort, in his business relations, the fortune of Murad the Unlucky with the inborn shiftlessness of Mr. Harold Skim-

pole. After his death, which took place a few months after his son's return from the Continent, his widow removed from London to Stoke, near Windsor, where she found a home in the house of a sister. Gray finding his home in London thus broken up, and either despairing of success in the law from his want of fortune, or — what is quite as probable — feeling a repugnance to the dry details of Coke and the Year-Books, took up his residence at Cambridge, — temporarily at first, and afterwards for life. Mason's account is as follows : —

“ But the narrowness of his circumstances was not the only thing that distressed him at this period. He had, as we have seen, lost the friendship of Mr. Walpole abroad. He had also lost much time in his travels ; a loss which application could not easily retrieve, when so severe and laborious a study as that of the common law was to be the object of it ; and he well knew that, whatever improvement he might have made in this interval, either in taste or science, such improvement would stand him in little stead with regard to his present situation and exigencies.”

It was never a matter of regret with him that he did not wear the coif. Many years later in life he writes thus : —

“ I am never so angry as when I hear my acquaintance wishing they had been bred to some poking profession, or employed in some office of drudgery ; as if it were pleasanter to be at the command of other people, than at one's own ; and as if they could not go, unless they were wound up : yet I know and feel what they mean by this complaint ; it proves that some spirit, something of genius (more than common) is required to teach a man how to employ himself.”

It was, indeed, far better, both for him and for us, that he chose the cloisters of Cambridge instead of the law of London. If he had donned the barrister's wig, he would have made a bad lawyer, and spoiled a good poet. The qualities which give success at the bar were not his. He had none of Mr. Stryver's knack at elbowing himself forward in life, no strong animal spirits, no relish for business, no latent oratorical gifts, no love for mixing with men, and not the slightest desire to make money. Mason said that he had ever expunged the word *lucrative* from his vocabulary. His sensitiveness, his retiring nature, his almost feminine tastes, his meditative habits, and his bookishness, were, from the beginning, a part of himself,

and could not be left out of the account. It would have been most fatal not to recognize these facts of his being, or to attempt, in spite of them, to make himself other than nature meant, — to build up the fabric of his life from another ground-plan than that which the great Architect had given him. The duties of business — of an active life of the world — were not, and could not be, for him. He was of necessity a student, a thinker ; and if not that, then just nothing at all. His life at Cambridge furnished nearly all the conditions necessary to his well-being ; giving him an assured competency, books, leisure, ease, freedom from harassing cares, and congenial associations. An official position as Professor, or the like, such as he had for a few years near the close of his life, would have been, perhaps, an additional benefit, as it would have added an incentive, and supplied a more direct object, to his labors. It is, indeed, a matter of regret that the tree bore so little fruit ; but that little was all sound and sweet, and much of it surpassingly rich. Many trees yield much fruit, but few bear the golden pippins. The plants which give the choicest flavor are often great absorbers and rare producers.

While in Paris, Gray had seen on the stage Racine's *Britannicus*. It seems to have impressed him forcibly, and that tragedy was always a favorite with him. Under the influence of his warm admiration of the work, he was led, shortly after his return, to attempt a tragedy on the Death of Agrippina, in Racine's manner. The plan was fully written out ; but only the first scene and a part of the second were completed. This fragment he sent to West, in 1742, with the following odd comment : " I take the liberty of sending you a long speech of Agrippina, — much too long, but I could be glad you would retrench it. . . . I fancy, if it ever be finished, it will be in the nature of Nat Lee's *Bedlam Tragedy*, which had twenty-five acts and some odd scenes." It is no loss to us that the tragedy was not finished, and that Gray never attempted another. His might have been the classic severity and the cold correctness of the French drama, but not the heroic rage of Corneille or the tender sentiments of Racine. His fire was to burn on other altars. If he could not pay a worthy tribute to Melpomene, he could offer a royal oblation

to Bacchus Dithyrambus. His hand could touch the lyre, though his foot might not tread the stage.

The "Ode to Spring" — Gray's first complete production in English lyric verse — was written at the residence of his family at Stoke, in the summer of 1742. As was his custom at that time with most of his writings, the Ode was sent to his friend West. But it never met his eye, for he was now no more, having died a short time previous. The manuscript title of the Ode was at first "Noontide"; but the present form is more appropriate, as the time of noon is merely an incident to the movement of the piece, and not the main subject of thought. There is a slumbrous quiet diffused throughout, a soothing murmur of summer insects, a lull in the very air, to which we must fain yield. In the lazy days of our early summer, which correspond to the English spring, these verses have always been and will be prime favorites with us. They give us rest and peace, and bring us into unison with the spirit of nature around. The turn at the end from nature to man is in the style of some of the serious Odes of Horace, — light and graceful. The application to human life is barely touched, not hammered out heavily, as we find it in Wordsworth and Bryant. Dr. Johnson admits that the Ode "has something poetical, both in the language and the thought; but the language is too luxuriant, and the thoughts have nothing new. . . . . The morality is natural, but too stale; the conclusion is pretty." He objects also to the prevailing practice of making participles from adjectives derived from substantives, such as "the *cultured* plain," "the *daisied* bank," and censures Gray's expression of "the *honied* spring." The Doctor must surely have been dreaming when he spoke so strongly in condemnation of an expression sanctioned by the highest authorities in our language. Whoever has the curiosity may find quoted in Mitford's Life of Gray a thorough refutation by Lord Grenville of this quibbling criticism of the great growler. We do not and shall not refer to his remarks on Gray, on account of any intrinsic merit or justness they possess; for they possess little or none. So great an authority, however, must carry weight, and deserves consideration, no matter what sentence it may pronounce. But the verdict of



the literary world in regard to his criticism on Gray has long been in accordance with the judgment of Sir James Mackintosh, who declared it to be "a monstrous example of critical injustice." We shall have occasion, before we close, to consider this topic more particularly.

The year 1742 was for Gray a fruitful one. Besides the "Ode to Spring," he wrote that noble "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," a Sonnet on the death of his friend West, and the "Hymn to Adversity." At this time, too, he gave the first touch to his "Elegy." He also turned his hand to translations from Greek, Latin, and Italian, and composed an epigram in Greek, and a fragment of his Latin poem "De Principiis Cogitandi." His classical studies were diligently prosecuted. He now took up his permanent residence at the University, and devoted himself for some time chiefly to the study of the Greek authors. After this period, he was seldom absent from the University for any great length of time, except from 1759 to 1762, when he visited London for the purpose of consulting the Harleian and other manuscripts in the British Museum, which was then first opened. But though residing almost for a lifetime within the precincts of his College, he had little sympathy with the tastes, or respect for the scholarship and mode of education, then prevailing at Cambridge. The devotion to mathematics which has always characterized that University was greater, comparatively speaking, then than now; and to Gray it seemed excessive. His tastes did not find, as we have before remarked, any gratification in the calculations of the science of quantity. Nor were the subtile speculations of the science of mind thoroughly congenial to him. A few years previously, during his first residence at Cambridge, in 1736, he indicates, in a letter to his friend Mr. Peterhouse, the tastes which accompanied him through life. He writes: "Must I plunge into metaphysics? Alas! I cannot see in the dark: nature has not furnished me with the optics of a cat. Must I pore upon mathematics? Alas! I cannot see in too much light: I am no eagle. It is very possible that two and two make four, but I would not give four farthings to demonstrate this ever so clearly; and if these be the profits of life, give

me the amusements of it." Though he did not approve of the course of study laid down, it was highly injudicious in him, to say the least, while a resident of the University, to criticise so harshly its scholarship and to satirize so freely its members. His course did not tend to heal breaches or to conciliate friends. He and his friend West seem to have sympathized on this point, as on most others. The tone of their letters in regard to their respective Universities is quite similar. West writes from Oxford: "Consider me very seriously here in a strange country, inhabited by things that call themselves Doctors and Masters of Arts, — a country flowing with syllogisms and ale, where Horace and Virgil are equally unknown." Gray even wrote a fragment of a "Hymn to Ignorance," whose object was to ridicule the system of things at Cambridge. Though commenced in this year 1742, it was never completed; nor did it meet the eye of the public till after his decease. It was undoubtedly suggested in some part, as Mitford thinks, by Pope's *Dunciad*, the fourth book of which had appeared a short time before. Bacon, we know, in a former age, spoke with great severity of the system of study prevalent in his own time; and, at a later day, Gibbon devoted many pages of his *Autobiography* to a stern criticism of education at Oxford. But neither Bacon nor Gibbon passed a lifetime within the cloisters they despised; and it would have been far more fitting for Gray either to satirize less or to be absent more.

As we remarked above, Gray now employed himself chiefly in reading the Greek authors. He applied himself with such assiduity, that, as Mason remarks, in the course of six years he had not only read, but thoroughly digested, every writer of note in that language, making at the same time, with the nicest scholarship, extracts, collations, criticisms, and commentaries on subjects and authors, and also preparing for his own use a labored Table of Greek Chronology. He writes to a friend: "I have read Pausanias and Athenæus all through; and Æschylus again. I am now in Pindar, and Lysias; for I take verse and prose together, like bread and cheese." His diligence again calls to mind the case of Gibbon, when at Lausanne, some ten years later, prosecuting the study of Greek,

as he himself says, without exaggeration, with "the most extraordinary diligence and rapid progress." The labors of both were indeed prodigious.

For a long time after returning to Cambridge, Gray seems to have repressed all poetic flights, contenting himself with study and meditation alone. His fertility in composition had been left behind him at Stoke. For many years the divine afflatus did not inspire him; and never again with the steady breath of 1741-42, but only in short and fitful gusts. The demon of study filled his soul with the greed of acquisition, and tempted him into many dry places. He often told Mason that reading was much more agreeable to him than writing. To a friend he wrote: "My life is like Harry the Fourth's, — 'Poulets en Ragoût, Poulets en Hachis, Poulets en Fricassée.' Reading here, reading there; nothing but books with different sauces." And at another time: "When you have seen one of my days, you have seen a whole year of my life; they go round and round, like the blind horse in the mill, only he has the satisfaction of fancying he makes a progress, and gets over some ground; my eyes are open enough to see the same dull prospect, and to know that, having made four-and-twenty steps more, I shall be just where I was." Towards the close of his life, Gray formed the acquaintance of an intelligent young Swiss, named De Bonstetten, son of the treasurer of Berne, and of a noble family. After studying at Lausanne and Leyden, he came to Cambridge, and there met Gray. In 1831 — just sixty years after Gray's death — De Bonstetten, then a man laden with years, wrote his "Souvenirs," which were published in the following year. His memory carried him faithfully back to the scenes of his younger days, and placed him face to face, as it were, with "le poète Anglais" whom he had known so long ago. His account gives so graphic a picture of Gray in his University retreat, and so well marks some of the predominant traits in his character, that we cannot pass it by. Nor have we the heart to dilute its racy flavor by translation. We give it, therefore, as written: —

"Dix-huit ans avant mon séjour à Nyon, j'avais passé quelques mois à Cambridge avec le célèbre poète Gray, presque dans la même inti-

mité qu'avec Matthison, mais avec cette différence que Gray avait trente ans de plus que moi, et Matthison seize de moins. Ma gaieté, mon amour pour la poésie Anglaise que je lisais avec Gray, l'avaient comme subjugué, de manière que la différence de nos âges n'était plus sentie par nous. J'étais logé à Cambridge dans un café, voisin de Pembroke Hall; Gray y vivait enseveli dans une espèce de cloître d'où le quinzième siècle n'avait pas encore déménagé. . . . Gray en se condamnant à vivre à Cambridge oubliait que le génie du poète languit dans la sécheresse du cœur. Le génie poétique de Gray était tellement éteint dans le sombre manoir de Cambridge, que le souvenir de ses poésies lui étaient odieux. Il ne permit jamais de lui en parler. Quand je lui citais quelque vers de lui, il se taisait comme un enfant obstiné. Je lui disais quelquefois 'Voulez-vous bien me répondre?' Mais aucune parole ne sortait de sa bouche. Je le voyais tous les soirs de cinq heures à minuit. Nous lisions Shakespeare qu'il adorait, Dryden, Pope, Milton, etc., et nos conversations, comme celles de l'amitié, n'arrivaient jamais à la dernière pensée. Je racontais à Gray ma vie et mon pays, mais toute sa vie à lui était fermée pour moi. Jamais il ne me parlait de lui. Il y avait chez Gray entre le présent et le passé un abîme infranchissable. Quand je voulais un rapproche, de sombres nuées venaient le couvrir. Je crois que Gray n'avait jamais aimé, c'était le mot de l'énigme. Il en était résulté une misère de cœur, qui faisait contraste avec son imagination ardente et profonde, qui, au lieu de faire le bonheur de sa vie, n'en était que le tourment. Gray avait de la gaieté dans l'esprit, et de la mélancolie dans le caractère. Mais cette mélancolie n'est qu'un besoin non satisfait de la sensibilité. Chez Gray elle tenait au genre de vie de son âme ardente, reléguée sous le pôle arctique de Cambridge."

The only objection to the foregoing portrait is, that its tints are many shades too sombre for the complexion of the original. It is hardly correct to speak of Gray as suffering from "la sécheresse du cœur," or "une misère de cœur." It is entirely true that "Gray avait de la gaieté dans l'esprit, et de la mélancolie dans le caractère"; but "la gaieté" was greater, and "la mélancolie" less than De Bonstetten thought, who judged his more mature friend with the eyes of youth. Gray's letters, and the accounts of those who knew him best, show that his life was not filled with gloom, nor void of affection. He was one who revealed himself very differently to different persons. His brightest side was seen only by those whom he

loved best, and with whom he had the strongest sympathy. The young Swiss, perhaps, saw neither the best nor the worst. The bond between them was not of the closest, and the poet at this late period of his life probably had a less free flow of spirits than in his younger days. Mr. Bancroft, in an essay on Temperaments, published many years ago in this Review, referred to Gray as an instance of the melancholic temperament, — according to the classification which prevailed at that time. Undoubtedly he was correct in supposing this temperament to have been predominant in the poet's organization. These designations of temperaments, however, though convenient for classification, and for *italicizing* in a general way the great leading facts of structure and constitution, are always extremely apt to mislead when we apply them. They represent only the *maxima* and *minima* of nature and of life. They describe types, not individuals. The proportions, if not abnormal, are, as compared with ordinary experience, out of drawing; for the sharpness of outline with which primeval nature might have touched her sketches of life has long since been worn away by the friction of countless generations. Seldom, if ever, is one found in whom the elements are so apportioned that his constitution accords with the prescribed ingredients of any one temperament. There is excess or deficiency in this or that point, and the man fails to tally with the measure of the books. Or, to change the figure, each temperament may be called a bed of Procrustes, to suit which the unlucky wight must be either stretched or clipped. Now, Gray's proportions are quite too large for this little cot-bed of melancholy. Either his temperament was not the unmixed melancholic, or the author of the essay above referred to erred in defining the root-principle — the main-spring — of that temperament. He says: "The melancholy man is haunted by a longing for glory." This is, with him, he remarks, the ruling passion, as love with the sanguineous, and ambition with the bilious man. Now it would be a hard thing, we take it, to prove that Gray was "haunted by a longing for glory," and an easy thing to show that he was not so haunted. The whole tenor of his life, the character of his studies, and the use made of them, his scanty productions, his neglect of

the plainest paths to distinction, his letters, and the accounts of those who knew him, — these all go to prove that the longing for glory was not a part of his being. In fact, of all men he was the most indifferent to this passion. It was this indifference, far more than any modesty or reserve, which led him to neglect to write, and often to omit publishing the little he had written. If he had felt the love of glory, he would never have had occasion to style himself “a shrimp of an author,” as he did in a letter to Walpole, only three years before his death. Mason says that the object of his life was only self-improvement and self-gratification in learning. Another biographer speaks of his life as one “constantly devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, and the general improvement of the mind, for its own sake, and as a final purpose.”

Again, the author of the essay remarks: “It is a weakness of the melancholic man, that he is always contemplating himself; the operations of his own mind, the real, or more probably the imaginary, woes of his own experience”; and “the melancholic is quite satisfied only when discoursing or musing on himself and his sorrows.” We have never thought that the former was Gray’s weakness, or one of his weaknesses; nor does his satisfaction seem to have sprung from the latter. We cannot now stop to discuss this point more fully. His writings and the story of his life are competent testimony; and we feel assured that they give evidence in our favor. If we should attempt to describe Gray’s organization in accordance with the theory of temperaments, we should say that it was a representative of no one temperament, but a combination of three, — of the nervous and the phlegmatic with the melancholic, to use the nomenclature of the above-cited essay; and that the last was predominant. And if for a moment, for the sake of clearness, we could borrow the language of quantity to illustrate that which admits not of quantity, we should say that, supposing the sum total of his organization to be represented by five, three parts would be melancholic, one nervous, and one phlegmatic. To the first were owing his distrust, his reserve, his fits of despondency, and his occasional ennui; from the second came his sprightliness, his dainty, wayward humor, his tact in letters and want

of tact in life, and his elasticity of touch as author ; while the third gave birth to his temptations to indolence, to his want of enthusiasm, to his narrow sympathies, and to his indifference to glory. It was because of the melancholic element in him that, while yet a young man, he wrote, in a fit of depression, a letter to West magnifying the blue devils of the moment into vapors of a lifetime : —

“Low spirits are my true and faithful companions ; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do ; nay, and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocose, and force a feeble laugh with me ; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world. However, when you come, I believe they must undergo the fate of all humble companions, and be discarded. Would I could turn them to the same use that you have done, and make an Apollo of them. If they could write such verses with me, not hartshorn, nor spirit of amber, nor all that furnishes the closet of an apothecary’s widow, should persuade me to part with them.”

It was his delicate nervous fibre that gave him his taste for quiet fun and raillery with his friends. He liked to fasten odd little nicknames on those he knew. King George II. went by the name of “The Old Horse” ; he called the Duke of Newcastle “Old Fobus” ; Lord Sandwich, “Jemmy Twitcher” ; Dr. James Brown, Master of Pembroke Hall, “Petit Bon” ; the Rev. Mr. Palgrave, “Old Pa” ; and his friend Mason, “Scooddles.” Hence, too, came the light touch of humor, sometimes almost evanescent, and the frisky, frolicsome spirit of his letters. Walpole wrote to Cole : “I find more people like the grave letters than those of humor ; some think the latter a little affected, which is as wrong a judgment as they could make, for Gray never wrote anything easily but things of humor ; humor was his natural and original turn, and though from his childhood he was grave and reserved, his genius led him to see things ludicrously and satirically ; and though his health and dissatisfaction gave him low spirits, his melancholy turn was much more affected than his pleasantry in writing.” And of his Life Walpole wrote, “I am charmed with it, and prefer it to all the biography I ever saw,” — probably on account of this same fine nervous touch of humor. His sensitiveness as an author was such, that for

some time he would not finish his "Ode on the Progress of Poesy," because Mason had told him that, though he admired it greatly, he thought it would not suit the public taste. And when Mason urged him to go on with it, he said: "No, you have thrown cold water upon it." Again, from the phlegmatic side of his nature sprang a tendency to indolence, — to the *dolce far niente*, — against which, however, he successfully struggled, but to which he often referred, sometimes lamenting it, and sometimes making merry about it. To Wharton he wrote: "The spirit of Laziness (the spirit of the place) begins to possess even me, that have so long declaimed against it. Yet has it not so prevailed but that I feel that discontent with myself, that *ennui* that ever accompanies it in its beginnings." At another time, speaking of his remissness, he wrote: "Nothing so silly as indolence, when it hopes to disguise itself; every one knows it by its saunter." Not only his leaning to laziness, but his indifference to glory, crops out in the following sportive aspiration for happiness, contained in a letter to West: "Now as the paradisiacal pleasures of the Mahometans consist in playing upon the flute and lying with Houris, be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon." At another time he speaks of his "natural indolence and indisposition to act, and a want of alacrity in indulging any distant hopes, however flattering." We could multiply instances indefinitely in support of the views we have taken of the temperament of Gray, but the preceding seem to us quite sufficient to illustrate and substantiate our position. Under the classification more commonly adopted, which counts four temperaments, — the sanguineous, the nervous, the bilious, and the lymphatic, — Gray's organization would seem to us to have been the nervo-lymphatic. And, following the theory of the phrenologists, who make the temperaments but three, — the active, the vital, and the mental, — the poet would be a happy instance of the union of the vital and the mental, the latter element being largely predominant.

Gray once told Nicholls that he believed he felt his first strong predilections for poetry when he began at Eton to read Virgil for his own amusement, and not in school hours



as a task. Mason thought that the reason of his not attempting anything earlier in English verse might be found in his education at Eton, which led him to the classics rather than to vernacular literature. The Ode to Eton College, written, as we have seen, at Stoke, in 1742, was not published till 1747, being the first appearance of our author in print as an English poet. It made its appearance unheralded and alone, and, according to the fashion of the day, it was judiciously swathed in folio. About this time, Gray's portrait was painted, at Walpole's request; and on the paper which he is represented as holding, Walpole wrote the title of the Ode, with a line from Lucan, —

“Nec licuit populis parvum te, Nile, videre.”

The poem met with very little attention until it was republished in 1751, with a few other of his Odes. Gray, in speaking of it to Walpole, in connection with the Ode to Spring, merely says that to him “the latter seems not worse than the former.” But the former has always been the greater favorite, — perhaps more from the matter than the manner. It is the expression of the memories, the thoughts, and the feelings which arise unbidden in the mind of the man, as he looks once more on the scenes of his boyhood. He feels a new youth in the presence of those old joys. But the old friends are not there. Generations have come and gone; and an unknown race now frolic in boyish glee. His sad, prophetic eye cannot help looking into the future, and comparing these careless joys with the inevitable ills of life. Already he sees the fury passions in wait for their little victims. They seem present to him, like very demons. Our language contains no finer, more graphic personifications than these almost tangible shapes. Spenser is more circumstantial, Collins more vehement, but neither is more real. Though but outlines in miniature, they are as distinct as Dutch art. Every epithet is a life-like picture; not a word could be changed without destroying the tone of the whole. At last the musing poet asks himself, *Cui bono?* Why thus borrow trouble from the future? Why summon so soon the coming locusts, to poison before their time the glad waters of youth?

“ Yet ah ! why should they know their fate,  
 Since sorrow never comes too late,  
 And happiness so quickly flies ?  
 Thought would destroy their paradise.  
 No more ; — where ignorance is bliss,  
 ’T is folly to be wise.”

So, feeling and the want of feeling come together for once in the moral. The gay Roman satirist — the apostle of indifference — reaches the same goal, though he has travelled a different road. To Thaliarchus he says : —

“ Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quærere : et  
 Quem Fors dierum cumque dabit, lucro  
 Appone.”

The same easy-going philosophy of life forms the key-note of the Ode to Leuconoë : —

“ Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero ” ;

of that to Quinctius Hirpinus : —

“ Quid æternis minorem  
 Consiliis animum fatigas ? ”

of that to Pompeius Grosphus : —

“ Lætus in præsens animus, quod ultra est,  
 Oderit curare.”

And so with many others. “ Take no thought of the morrow.”

Dr. Johnson, of course, could see in this Ode of Gray nothing to admire. Whatever was not stale morality and puerile sentiment was false rhetoric. But his hypercriticism, as has been well shown, was like a two-edged sword, cutting both ways. The address to “ Father Thames,” which he condemns, was sanctioned not only by the authority of Virgil, in his invocation to the Tiber, but subsequently by his own pompous apostrophe to the Nile, in *Rasselas*. The learned critic must surely have forgotten himself in his zeal for fault-finding. In fact, throughout his *Life of Gray*, his design seems to be only to quibble and carp, hardly rising anywhere into wholesome criticism. It is with much difficulty that he can persuade himself to make any admissions in favor of the author or the man ; he can concede that he might have written good

Latin verses, with more practice, that he had stored away much learning, that his accounts of his travels had some interest, and that the common judgment of the *Elegy* was, on the whole, correct. But farther than this he cannot go; to the many poetical merits of his author he is wilfully blind. Macaulay has very truly said of Johnson, that "the characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices"; that "his whole code of criticism rested on pure assumption"; and, in another place, that, of all his Lives, "the very worst is beyond all doubt that of Gray." He called Gray "a barren rascal," "a mechanical poet," and told Boswell that "he was dull everywhere. He was dull in a new way, and that made many people think him great." He accused him of "effeminacy," of "fantastic foppery," and of being "fastidious." But it does not appear so difficult as many have thought to ascertain the grounds of this dislike. Many reasons might be assigned. Though the poet was a contemporary of the critic,—being born seven years later, and dying thirteen years earlier,—he was never affiliated with the literary coterie of the great dictator, never bowed to his authority. He had, moreover, a certain ambition to be considered not as a professed author, but rather as a gentleman studying only for his own amusement. For these reasons, if for no other, he could claim neither mercy nor sympathy at the hands of his critic. But he was at the same time a Cambridge man, while Johnson thought with and for Oxford, clinging to its traditions with unusual ardor, and keeping alive its petty jealousies with all the rancor of the strongest partisan. Again, Gray was liberal and catholic in his views of the Church, and not at all given to priestcraft or superstition; but Johnson believed in the Cock-lane ghost, and was a Churchman of the stamp of Laud. Hartley Coleridge remarks, in his *Northern Worthies*, speaking of Bentley: "Everything in England takes the shape and hue of politics. You may form a very likely guess at an Englishman's political sentiments from hearing his opinions upon poetry, his comparative estimate of classical and mathematical learning, his preference of physical or metaphysical science, or even his judgment in a dispute between two neighboring families." The converse of the proposition

is also true. The opinions upon poetry may be inferred from the opinions upon politics. Now, Gray was "a vile Whig"; while Johnson worshipped Charles the Martyr, and fully believed in "the right divine of kings to govern wrong." Gray travelled, and studied history; Johnson thought that nothing was learned by travel, and had no patience with history. A trip in the Hampstead stage he placed on a par with the tour of Europe; he believed, with Sir Robert Walpole, that all history is false, and would have sympathized with D'Alembert in his wish that all record of past transactions could be blotted out. Besides, Gray was nice in his tastes, refined in his manners, and select in his friendships; Johnson—a boor in manner and a sloven in habits—railed at all delicacy as pure affectation. There was the same contrast in their studies as in their manners. Gray's researches were not only extensive, but exhaustive, never leaving his subject till it was thoroughly mastered in every part. There was nothing whatever of the sciolist about him. Johnson was comparatively but a smatterer in learning. He had not profound knowledge on any subject. He confessed that he seldom or never read a book through. In study, not only his precept but his practice was to follow the whim of the moment,—fortifying himself with the authority of Shakespeare:—

"No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en.  
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

Between minds so different there could be but little sympathy.

The above-named considerations are sufficient to explain the origin and to illustrate the nature of Johnson's violent prejudice against Gray. The men being what they were, the case could not have been different. There was necessarily, not only want of appreciation, but positive antipathy on the part of the critic. But he did not content himself with travelling the beaten path, and branding as cheap glass all the jewels he saw: he ransacked out-of-the-way corners for mud to fling at the owner. In this way he contributed largely to what Mackintosh justly called "the deformities of the Life of Gray." He stigmatized it as "a fantastic foppery" in Gray,

that "he had a notion, not very peculiar, that he could not write but at certain times or at happy moments." The notion was, indeed, "not very peculiar," as it has been held from the beginning, by probably nine out of every ten of the "*genus irritabile vatum*." But even if it were so, was it necessarily an affectation? Was the great Coryphæus himself entirely free from the notion? Why, then, the fifteen cups of tea by way of literary preparation? Why his needless delay in writing what had already been paid for? We submit that—to use a legal phrase—the complainant does not come into court with clean hands. But it is useless to dwell longer on this topic. The following thoughts, however, may be of service here in throwing light on the general *animus* of the biographer and critic. Hartley Coleridge remarks that, while Johnson admired Pope as a poet, he "had so little respect for him as a man, that he exerted more than his usual industry in collecting anecdotes to render him odious and contemptible. But Johnson appears to have written the lives of the poets with no other view but to convince the world that they were no more than 'indifferent children of the earth.'" Roscoe also, in his Preface to the Life of Pope, writes thus: "Throughout the whole of these Lives there appears an assumption of superiority in the biographer over the subject of his labors, which diminishes the idea of their talents, and leaves an unfavorable impression of their moral character." We are happy, in conclusion, to find one sentiment at least in the Life of Gray which we can cordially adopt: "By the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honors."

We come now to a more pleasing subject, — the consideration of the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard." It is upon this that Gray's fame as a poet must chiefly rest. By this he will be known forever alike to the lettered and the unlettered. Many, in future ages, who may never have heard of his classic Odes, his various learning, or his sparkling letters, will revere him only as the author of the Elegy. For this he will be enshrined through all time in the hearts of the myriads who shall speak our English tongue. For this his name will

be held in glad remembrance in the far-off summer isles of the Pacific, and amidst the wastes of polar snows. If he had written nothing else, his place as a leading poet in our language would still be assured. Many have asserted, with Johnson, that he was a mere mechanical poet, — one who brought from without, but never found within; that the gift of inspiration was not native to him; that his imagination was borrowed finery, his fancy tinsel, and his invention the world's well-worn jewels; that whatever in his verse was poetic was not new, and what was new was not poetic; that he was only an unworldly dyspeptic, living amid many books, and laboriously delving for a lifetime between musty covers, picking out now and then another's gems and bits of ore, and fashioning them into ill-compacted mosaics, which he wrongly called his own. To all this the *Elegy* is a sufficient answer. It is not old, — it is not bookish; it is new and human. Books could not make its maker: he was born of the divine breath alone. Consider all the commentators, the scholiasts, the interpreters, the annotators, and other like book-worms, from Aristarchus down to Doederlein; and may it not be said that, among them all, "*Nec viget quidquam simile aut secundum*"? Even his surly critic confesses that the four stanzas beginning, "*Yet even these bones*" are to him original; and that, "*had Gray often written thus, it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him.*" Gray wrote but little, yet he wrote that little well. He might have done far more for us; the same is true of most men, even of the greatest. The possibilities of a life are always in advance of its performance. But we cannot say that his life was a wasted one. Even this little *Elegy* alone should go for much. For, suppose that he had never written this, but instead had done much else in other ways, according to his powers; that he had written many learned treatises; that he had, with keen criticism, expounded and reconstructed Greek classics; that he had, perchance, sat upon the woolsack, and laid rich offerings at the feet of blind Justice; — taking the years together, would it have been, on the whole, better either for him or for us? Would he have added so much to the sum of human happiness? He might thus have made himself a power for a time, to be dethroned by some new

usurper in the realm of knowledge; now he is a power and a joy forever to countless thousands. Many humble homes have been gladdened; even the warrior on the eve of battle has been inspired by this simple Elegy. Call to mind the familiar yet ever beautiful story of Wolfe, who conquered and died on the Plains of Abraham. On the 13th of September, 1759, he and his army were floating at night along the St. Lawrence, to take their station for the morrow's conflict. Let us listen to the story in the words of Lord Mahon.

"Swiftly, but silently, did the boats fall down with the tide, unobserved by the enemy's sentinels at their posts along the shore. Of the soldiers on board, how eagerly must every heart have throbbed at the coming conflict! how intently must every eye have contemplated the dark outline, as it lay pencilled upon the midnight sky, and as every moment it grew closer and clearer, of the hostile heights! Not a word was spoken,—not a sound heard beyond the rippling of the stream. Wolfe alone—thus tradition has told us—repeated in a low voice to the other officers in his boat those beautiful stanzas with which a country churchyard inspired the Muse of Gray. One noble line—

‘The paths of glory lead but to the grave’—

must have seemed at such a moment fraught with mournful meaning. At the close of the recitation, Wolfe added, ‘Now, gentlemen, I would rather be the author of that poem than take Quebec.’”

What finer test of fame could there be than this? It is far better and truer than that which Coleridge applied to Thomson, when, finding in a country tavern a copy of “The Seasons” well-thumbed and dog’s-eared, yet carefully preserved, he exclaimed, “This is true fame.”

The Elegy, though commenced in 1742, soon after the death of West,—doubtless suggested in part by that event,—was not finished till some eight years afterward. Mason thought that possibly it was concluded in the same year which witnessed its commencement. Gray, however, has fixed the date beyond dispute, in a letter to Walpole, dated June 12, 1750: “I have been here at Stoke a few days (where I shall continue good part of the summer); and having put an end to a thing whose beginning you have seen long ago, I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it: a merit that most

of my writings have wanted, and are like to want." The "thing" thus referred to was unquestionably the Elegy, as all admit who have taken the trouble to look into the subject. It was never Gray's practice to force the growth of his best fruit, but to let it ripen slowly till the flavor was perfect. In the case of the Elegy, he complied literally with the Horatian precept, — "*Nonumque prematur in annum.*" It was first submitted in manuscript, in 1750, to the judgment of a small but select public, and received at once their hearty approbation. In February, 1751, it was given to the world. Its immediate success appears from a note in Gray's handwriting, on the margin of the Pembroke College manuscript, as follows: "Published in Feby 1751 by Dodsley and went thro' four editions in two months; & afterwards a fifth, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, & 10th, & 11th; printed also in 1753 with Mr. Bentley's Designs of w<sup>ch</sup> there is a 2<sup>d</sup> Edition & again by Dodsley in his Miscellany, Vol. 4th & in a Scotch collection called the Union; translated into Latin by Chr. Anstey Esq. & the Rev. Mr. Roberts, & published in 1762; & again in the same year by Rob. Lloyd, M.A." It was printed in the first editions, according to the author's wish, without any interval between the stanzas, his reason being that the sense was sometimes continued beyond them. He also wrote to Walpole, who superintended the publication, not to have the author's name appear, and thought it better, too, if the publisher would add a line or two to say that the poem came into his hands by accident. No one was more surprised than the author at its instant popularity, — arising, he thought, entirely from "the affecting and pensive cast of the subject," and not from the sentiment or the expression. In fact, he thought it would have succeeded equally well if written in prose. In this opinion he can only be considered as adding another instance to the long list of fallacious judgments of authors on their own works. The line from Virgil, —

"Sunt lacrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt," —

he at first thought of adopting as a motto for the poem; until Mason reminded him that it had been previously used for the same purpose by Young, in his "Night Thoughts."



Gray may be said to have been driven, in self-defence, to the publication of the *Elegy*. A copy of the poem slipped through Walpole's fingers into the hands of the proprietors of a periodical called "The Magazine of Magazines." On February 11, 1751, Gray wrote to Walpole that he had received a letter from the gentlemen conducting the Magazine, saying that they were publishing the *Elegy*, and desiring the honor of his correspondence. Then first it was that Gray thought of publishing the work for himself, lest he should sow and another should reap. Thereupon he wrote to Walpole the directions as above, wishing him, too, to get Dodsley to hurry up the work as soon as possible, — to print it in less than a week's time with best paper and character. It was thus a close race between the Magazine and Dodsley; but the former, having a little the start, came out a few days ahead. Reversing the usual order, the Magazine gave the author's name, while the author's own edition, in book form, was anonymous, and sent into the world under the fiction of an accident. Its paper was coarse; its pages were seven; the attractions of its frontispiece were scythes and hour-glasses, skulls and marrow-bones; and its price was sixpence. It — the *princeps editio* — was, in fact, the very antipodes of the beautiful edition published by the Etching Club, in 1847, or of that issued in 1846, illuminated by Owen Jones. As great a contrast exists between the first review which we have of the poem, and the careful criticisms of later years. The *Monthly Review* — then the great Rhadamanthus — gave the following notice: "*An Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. 4to. Dodsley. Seven pages. — The excellence of this little piece amply compensates for its want of quantity." This, at all events, has the merit of brevity.

It would be useless for us to attempt an analysis or criticism of a poem so well known and so much bewritten as the *Elegy*. We could say nothing which has not been often said before. "Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt!" We will therefore leave this travelled road, and pick our way along a humbler path. The poem, as we now read it, is quite different from the author's original draft, and also varies somewhat from the text of the early editions. It will be both instructive and

interesting to examine these various changes, and to observe how sentiments and expressions were gradually modified in the author's mind,—almost invariably for the better. We can thus better appreciate the exquisite taste, the elaborate finish, the patient painstaking of years, which the author displays,—more characteristically here than elsewhere. Fortunately, all the means of comparison remain. Two manuscripts of the *Elegy*, in Gray's own handwriting, still exist. Their history in brief is as follows. Both were bequeathed by Gray, together with his library, letters, and many other miscellaneous papers, to his friends the Rev. William Mason and the Rev. Dr. James Browne, Master of Pembroke Hall, as joint literary executors. Mason bequeathed the entire trust to Mr. Stonehewer. The latter, in making his will, divided these literary remains into two parts. The larger share fell to the Master and Fellows of Pembroke Hall. Among the papers—which are still in the possession of the College—was found a copy of the *Elegy*, now known as the Pembroke Hall Manuscript. An excellent fac-simile appears in Mathias's edition of Gray, published in 1814, by desire of the College authorities,—numbered second on our list at the head of this article. The remaining portion of Gray's literary bequest was left by Mr. Stonehewer to his friend, Mr. Bright. This collection comprised the poet's library, a volume of unpublished correspondence with Mason, and various other letters and papers,—also the other manuscript of the *Elegy*. In 1845, Mr. Bright's sons sold the collection at auction. A Mr. Penn, of Stoke-Poges, was the chief purchaser. The volume of correspondence he placed in Mitford's hands for publication. This is the work published in 1853,—numbered fifth on our list. Mr. Penn also bought the manuscript of the *Elegy* for £100,—the highest sum ever paid for a single sheet of paper. Among others, the manuscript of "A Long Story" brought £45. The entire collection of papers was sold for £418 7s. In 1854, this manuscript of the *Elegy* came again into the market, and was finally knocked down to Mr. Robert Charles Wrightson for the unprecedented sum of £131. As he is still the owner of it, we shall designate it as the Wrightson MS. The recent publication of a beautiful photograph of

this manuscript—numbered seven on our list—has aroused a new interest in the poem, and has called forth some slight discussion as to the comparative claims to originality of the two manuscripts. Mr. Wrightson asserts that his is the original, and that the autograph at Pembroke Hall is manifestly a fair copy made by the poet. After careful examination, we are inclined to think him correct. The Wrightson MS. contains a greater number of alterations, and is more at variance with our present version. It was probably the rough draft, while the other represents the poem at a stage or two later. We shall therefore take the Wrightson MS. as our standard of comparison. The poem was written on the four sides of a sheet of common letter-paper, about seven inches by nine. The writing is now rather faint, but still clear and distinct, though close and much interlined. The sheet has many folds and creases, which may have been due, as has been suggested, to its being carried about in a pocket-book to read at tea-drinkings and other social gatherings of appreciating friends.

The numbering which we adopt is that of the stanzas in our present version. The Wrightson MS. contains six entire verses—(or rather five, one being remodelled and used in another part of the poem)—which are now omitted, besides many words, phrases, and entire lines which have been recast. That these alterations are generally for the better is due not only to Gray's own good taste, but in part also to the less partial judgment of Mason, who suggested several variations.

The 1st stanza is unaltered. Dr. Warton, however, used to make the first line read thus:—

“The curfew tolls!—The knell of parting day.”

But the version is merely *auctore* Warton.

In the 2d stanza, the phrase “And all the air” is in the MS. “And now the air.” The word “now” had been used in the preceding line.

The 5th stanza is, according to the MS., as follows:—

“For ever sleep. The breezy call of morn,  
Or swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,  
Or Chaunticleer so shrill, or echoing horn,” &c.

In the 8th stanza, “rustic joys” has been changed to “homely joys.”

The first two lines in the 10th stanza stand thus in the MS.: —

“Forgive, ye proud, th’ involuntary fault,  
If memory to these no trophies raise.”

The MS. has, in the 12th stanza, “reins of empire” instead of the present form, “rod of empire.” The latter form is far more appropriate to be used with the verb *sway*.

In the 13th stanza, the MS. reads “depressed” for “repressed.”

The MS. form of the 15th stanza is as follows: —

“Some village Cato, who, with dauntless breast,  
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Tully here may rest;  
Some Cæsar guiltless of his country’s blood.”

In the printed version we have Hampden for Cato, Milton for Tully, and Cromwell for Cæsar. These changes, suggested by Mason, are most judicious, being in keeping with the thoroughly English character of the poem.

In the 18th stanza, the MS. has “crown the shrine” for “heap the shrine.” After this stanza, the MS. contains the four following stanzas, now omitted: —

“The thoughtless World to Majesty may bow,  
Exalt the brave, and idolise success;  
But more to Innocence their safety owe  
Than Power and Genius e’er conspired to bless.

“And thou who, mindful of the unhonored Dead,  
Dost in these notes their artless tale relate,  
By night and lonely contemplation led  
To linger in the lonely walks of Fate:

“Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around  
Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;  
In still small accents whisp’ring from the ground  
A grateful earnest of eternal peace.

“No more, with Reason and thyself at strife,  
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room;  
But through the cool sequester’d vale of life  
Pursue the silent tenour of thy doom.”

The second of these rejected stanzas, it will be noticed, has

been made over, and adopted as the twenty-fourth of the present version. Mason thought that there was a pathetic melancholy in the entire four, which highly claimed preservation. He considered the third as equal to any in the whole *Elegy*. The poem was originally intended to end here, until the happy idea of the hoary-headed swain suggested itself to the author.

In the 19th stanza, the MS. reading is "knew to stray," in place of "learn'd to stray." It will be noticed that the last two lines vary but slightly from the last two lines of the fourth of the above rejected stanzas.

In the 21st stanza, "Epitaph" has been changed to "Elegy."

The MS. reading of the last line of the 23d stanza is as follows:—

"And buried ashes glow with social fires."

"Social" became "wonted" in the first and some following editions; and finally the entire line was changed to its present finer form. As it stands, it seems to us one of the happiest lines of the poem, as it has certainly been one of the most popular. Mason preferred, however, the first reading,—with "wonted" substituted for "social," and objected to what he called "the appearance of quaintness" in the later version. He also objected, rather hypercritically we think, to the obscurity of the idea in both readings, and thought it might be amended by rejecting the metaphysical term "fires," and making the line stand thus:—

"Awake and faithful to her first desires."

"Cela est très beau, mais ce n'est pas la poésie."

In the MS., the 24th stanza reads as follows:—

"If chance, that e'er some pensive Spirit more,  
By sympathetic musings here delay'd,  
With vain, though kind inquiry shall explore  
Thy once-loved haunt, this long deserted shade."

The present version seems to have been compounded of a judicious blending of the above with the second of the four rejected stanzas.

The MS. form of the last line of the 25th stanza is the following:—

"On the high brow of yonder hanging lawn."

Here occurs a stanza now omitted : —

“ Him have we seen the greenwood side along,  
While o’er the heath we hied, our labours done,  
Oft as the woodlark piped her farewell song,  
With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun.”

Mason remarked: “ I rather wonder that he rejected this stanza, as it not only has the same sort of Doric delicacy which charms us peculiarly in this part of the poem, but also completes the account of his whole day ; whereas, this evening scene being omitted, we have only his morning-walk, and his noontide repose.”

In the 27th stanza, the first line appears thus in the MS. : —

“ With gestures quaint, now smiling as in scorn,” —

instead of the present form, “ Hard by yon wood,” &c.

After the 29th stanza, and before the Epitaph, the MS. contains the following omitted stanza : —

“ There scatter’d oft, the earliest of ye year,  
By hands unseen are frequent violets found ;  
The robin loves to build and warble there,  
And little footsteps lightly print the ground.”

This — with two or three verbal changes only — was inserted in all the editions up to 1753, when it was dropped. This appears by a note in Gray’s handwriting, on the margin of the Pembroke Hall MS., as follows: “ Omitted in 1753.” The omission was not made from any objection to the stanza in itself, but simply because it was too long a parenthesis in this place ; on the principle which he states in a letter to Dr. Beattie: “ As to description, I have always thought that it made the most graceful ornament of poetry, but never ought to make the subject.” The part was sacrificed for the good of the whole. Mason very justly remarked, that “ the lines, however, are in themselves exquisitely fine, and demand preservation.”

In the first line of the 31st stanza — the 2d of the Epitaph — the MS. has “ heart ” for “ soul.”

The MS. version of the 32d and last stanza is as follows : —

“ No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Nor seek to draw them from their dread abode —  
(His frailties there in trembling hope repose) ;  
The bosom of his Father and his God.”

Mitford has made several technical criticisms of words and phrases occurring in this poem. Some of the corrections are, however, entirely gratuitous. For instance, the word "or" at the beginning of the second line of the last stanza, as it reads in the printed version, he says should be "nor." But either might be grammatically correct; for the clause will bear two constructions equally appropriate, one of which would require the connective "or," and the other "nor." If the verb "draw" is an imperative, standing in the same category as, and independent of, the verb "seek," in the first line, the force of the negative connected with "seek" would extend, of course, only to its subsidiary words, and would therefore be exhausted at the end of the first line, with the word "disclose." For the second line a new negative would then be needed. But "draw" may be an infinitive, with its sign "to" omitted. It would then stand in the same category with "to disclose," in the first line,—both being similarly dependent on the leading word "seek"; and the negative expressed with this governing word would then be of force throughout all the subordinate phrases, as far as the end of the second line. In this case, the connective "or" could alone be used. That this last construction was in the mind of the poet—that the word "seek" must be understood as the governing word to the word "draw"—appears from the above MS. version, where "seek" is repeated. We might dispose in a similar way of other needless criticisms of Mitford; but "*le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*."

The places which have been assigned as the locality of the Elegy are almost as numerous as the cities which claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. We can stop for but a word or two in regard to a few of the competitors. The more general sentiment has always been in favor of Stoke-Poges; and in our own mind there is no doubt of its correctness. It can be proved that the Elegy was commenced in the year 1742; that during a good part of that year Gray was at Stoke; that the Ode to Eton College, the Ode to Spring, and probably some others, were not only written in this same year, but written at Stoke; that the Elegy was finished at Stoke, in the year 1750; that the place was familiar to him by his own resi-

dence there, and endeared by the presence of his fondly cherished mother, and by many other precious associations ; and that it has a churchyard in perfect keeping with the spirit of the poem, where the remains of the author were finally placed, at his own request, by the side of his mother. Negatively, we hear no mention of the poem, and can find no trace whatever of its having been touched at all between these two dates of 1742 and 1750, in each of which years the author spent several months at Stoke. No other place has a tithe of these probabilities in its favor. The common Cambridge tradition is, that Gray was in the habit of taking his "constitutional" daily to Grantchester, a small parish about two miles and a half southwest of the University ; and that to Grantchester the Elegiac honors should be paid. A similar tradition makes a similar claim, on similar grounds, for Madingley, some three miles and a half northwest of Cambridge. Both Grantchester and Madingley possess suitable machinery and properties in the shape of sweet English burial-places ; and that is nearly all that can be said in favor of their claims. In regard to both, it seems to us that "the wish was father to the thought." It should certainly require strong evidence to rebut the manifest *a priori* objections to Cambridge as the meridian of the poem. We cannot easily believe that Gray would select as the scene of so tender a piece any spot which was not hallowed by the fondest associations. The writer of the remarks appended to the Photograph of the Wrightson MS. puts forward a claim in behalf of a place called Burnham Beeches, in Buckinghamshire, which Gray often visited, his uncle having a seat in the neighborhood. He once wrote to Walpole a very pretty description of the mountains and precipices of the place, and casually mentioned the existence of certain beeches, at the foot of which he would "squat," and "there grow to the trunk a whole morning." This word "beeches" is quite enough for our writer. He recollects that the word "beech" occurs in the Elegy. This remarkable coincidence means something. Of course it proves satisfactorily that the beech-containing poem sprang from the beech-containing place. No other hypothesis will support the facts in the case ; and it is no objection whatever that Burn-



ham has "beeches," but no vestige of a churchyard. This want he proposes to supply by borrowing *pro re nata* "the picturesque churchyard in the path at Stoke." Thus the *dramatis personæ* of this poor farce of a theory are made complete. But we will delay no longer on this much-vexed question. Our own judgment we have already recorded in favor of Stoke.

The popularity of the Elegy has not been confined within the limits of its native tongue. No English poem has been so often translated. A few years ago the number of versions in different languages were reckoned up as follows: in Hebrew, one; in Greek, eight; in Latin, twelve; in Italian, thirteen; in Portuguese, one; in French, fifteen; and in German, six. Polyglot editions have been issued not only in England, but in Italy. Dr. Beattie wrote that Gray was justly admired beyond any poet of his age; yet that few knew anything of his but the Elegy, by no means the best of his works. Byron, however, thought that, if Gray had written nothing else, his fame might have stood even higher than at present.

We may remark, in passing, that the third line of the Elegy —

"The ploughman homeward plods his weary way"—

is quite peculiar in its possible transformations. We have made twenty different versions preserving the rhythm, the general sentiment, and the rhyming word. Any one of these variations might be, not inappropriately, substituted for the original reading.

We have left ourselves but little space for speaking of Gray's remaining poems, and will say but a word or two in reference to a few of them. The fragment of about one hundred lines, "On the Alliance of Education and Government," was finished, so far as we have it, about 1755, though published posthumously. Gibbon asks regretfully: "Instead of compiling tables of chronology and natural history, why did not Mr. Gray apply the powers of his genius to finish the philosophic poem of which he has left such an exquisite specimen?" In the same year, "The Bard" was commenced, and the "Ode on the Progress of Poesy" finished; and two years later they were published. The higher kind of

lyrics are nearly as rare as good epics ; and it is no slight praise to an author to have written two odes which are entitled to a leading place among their fellows in all tongues. In English they will rank forever with Milton's Ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," Dryden's "Ode in Honor of St. Cecilia's Day," commonly called "Alexander's Feast," Collins's "Ode to the Passions," and Wordsworth's "Ode on Immortality." "The Bard" we should place above all but the last, for its magnificent diction, its lofty passion, its skillful variety, and its gorgeous imagination. Neither of the two Odes has ever been popular, or ever will be. They presuppose too high cultivation, and require too strict attention, for the mass of readers. But to minds enriched by sound learning, and gifted with poetic insight, they have ever been precious legacies. Gray very amusingly adverts, in letters to Hurd, Wharton, and Mason, shortly after their publication, to the prolific ridicule launched from many quarters at these poems, — consisting mainly of charges of obscurity, incomprehensibleness, and the like. These charges have been so often and so ably refuted that we will not dwell longer upon them.

Few English poets have left, in proportion to the bulk of their writings, so many common quotations and pet phrases as Gray. To say nothing of the Elegy, whose diction has been coined throughout into household words with all, there are, scattered up and down in this little poem, scores of well-worn passages, —

"Jewels five words long,  
That on the stretched forefinger of all Time  
Sparkle forever."

Every one admires them, though not every one knows the owner. Common opinion, we know, is at variance with us on this point, and supposes that Gray left but little which is in general use ; and we therefore regret the more that time will not permit us to point out any of these bright poetical stars which have wandered away from their allegiance. Gray could not have been a mere scholarly recluse ; cordial adoption is given only to the poet who has heart, humanity, and sympathy. Burns and Gray had but little in common ; they were antipodes in very many respects. We should hardly look for

a warm appreciation of the book-learned poet from the rustic bard; and least of all for any testimony to his feeling and emotion. And yet even Burns noted him as more than all a poet of passion. In his poem called "The Vision," singling out Gray from all others, he speaks of himself as one unable to

"Pour, with Gray, the moving flow  
Warm on the heart."

Yet the one most prominent feature of his poetry was its supreme art. As a poetical artist he has had, during the whole range of English literature, not one superior. We should be inclined to name two, and only two, as his compeers,—Pope and Tennyson. These three have hardly anything else in common than their exquisite finish; and yet the finish of each is his own, flowing from the nature of the man. The finish of Pope is that of the shrewd logician, most cunning in verbal fence; that of Gray is the expression of the scholar and man of feeling combined, showing the nicest culture and broadest sympathies; that of Tennyson marks the acute, almost morbid metaphysician, who delights in subtle analysis, and taxes the powers of language to embody whatever is most shadowy in feeling and most vague in thought. Pope's verse is the Damascus blade, polished and trenchant,—it glitters, and tells of death; Gray's is the graceful column, whose smooth surface reflects both light and heat, whose faultless outline attests the maker's skill, and whose sides are adorned here and there with precious mosaics from far-off lands; Tennyson's is a glassy mirror gorgeously framed, whose surface is misty and splintered, showing us beautiful bits of humanity and of nature; yet piecemeal, cloudy, and out of line. Pope's surface reflects light alone; Gray's more heat than light; and Tennyson's more light than heat. Or we may say generally, that the art of the first lies mainly in words; that of the second in synthesis; and that of the last in analysis.

We have already alluded to Gray's admiration of Dryden. For Spenser, too, he had a great fondness, and always read his works for some time before composing,—quite as fitting a preparation for writing as Milton's practice of playing the

organ, and more pleasing than Dryden's prelude of a course of physic. He admired Pope, particularly his art of condensation. He thought that there would never be another such translation of the Iliad. Of his Letters he observed, that they were not good letters, but better things. Goldsmith he liked best among the later poets, and recognized his genius from the first. Warton and Collins deserved to last some years, but would not, he thought.

After residing at Peter-House for nearly a quarter of a century, Gray removed, in 1756, to Pembroke Hall. He mentions the change, in a letter to Dr. Wharton in March, 1756, as owing to the riotous disposition of some of the younger members of the College. The Cambridge tradition is as follows. The poet had inserted a spike under his lofty garret-window at Peter-House, and provided himself with a rope by which to descend in case of fire. Hearing the alarm at midnight, he descended, — not upon *terra firma*, but into a huge, well-filled wash-tub from the brewery, which had been rolled under his window by the kind exertions of his brother collegians. It is said that he soon discovered that it was water, and not fire. The spike still remains; but the poet departed. He describes his removal "as an era in a life so barren of events as his." In 1757 he was offered, and declined, the position of Poet-Laureate. He wrote to Mason: "The office has always humbled the possessor hitherto; — if he were a poor writer, by making him more conspicuous; and if he were a good one, by setting him at war with the little fry of his own profession; for there are poets little enough even to envy a poet-laureate." In 1762 he applied unsuccessfully for the vacant place of Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Six years later the place was given to him, without solicitation, by the Duke of Grafton. But the duties of the chair he never discharged. He was always promising, and always procrastinating. His only performance was an unpublished fragment of the plan for his inauguration speech, of which Mason thought highly. Few were so well fitted for the place as he, either by knowledge of detail or breadth of view; although he wrote — with too much modesty — to Walpole: "History in particular is not our *forte*; for (the truth is) we read only modern books

and pamphlets of the day." In 1769 he wrote his *Ode for Music*, which was performed at the installation of the Duke of Grafton as Chancellor of the University. His own opinion of this production was not high, and he thought the poem could not last above a single day. It is, however, as has been well remarked, "a very splendid creation raised on an apparently barren subject."

Gray's journey to Scotland, in 1765, and his various excursions in other years to Wales, and to the Lakes and other regions in England, added to his letters many delightful sketches, with racy remarks on life and manners. Even Johnson called the account of his tour in Scotland "curious and elegant"; and of his journey to Westmoreland and Cumberland, in 1769, he said: "He that reads his epistolary narration wishes, that to travel, and to tell his travels, had been more of his employment; but it is by studying at home that we must obtain the ability of travelling with intelligence and improvement." Walpole — a very good judge on a point of this kind — said: "His letters are the best I ever saw, and had more novelty and wit." And the caustic Carlyle, who has no patience with the poetry, cannot help saying a good word for the correspondence. In his *Essay on Goethe*, he remarks: "Were it not for his letters, which are full of warm, exuberant power, we might almost doubt whether Gray was a man of genius; nay, was a living man at all, and not rather some thousand times more cunningly devised poetical turning-loom, than that of Swift's philosophers in *Laputa*." Hazlitt, too, regarded the letters as "inimitably fine," and said that, even if the poems were at times pedantic, as he thought them, the prose was free from affectation. Southey called Cowper the best of English letter-writers; but Cowper himself gave the pre-eminence to Gray.

Gray breathed his last at Cambridge, on the 30th of July, 1771, in the fifty-fifth year of his age. He was never married, and survived all the members of his family. He was always delicate, and was the only one of twelve children who grew up. His father had died many years before; and in 1753 he lost his mother, whose name he seldom mentioned without a sigh, and to whom he felt that he was indebted for almost

everything. He was buried by her side in the churchyard at Stoke-Poges. In 1778 a monument was erected to him by Mason, in Westminster Abbey, bearing the following appropriate inscription:—

“No more the Grecian Muse unrivalled reigns,  
To Britain let the nations homage pay;  
She felt a Homer’s fire in Milton’s strains,  
A Pindar’s rapture in the lyre of Gray.”

We cannot pass by—in spite of its familiarity—the comprehensive and generally judicious account of Gray prepared soon after his decease by his friend, the Rev. Mr. Temple. It is as follows:—

“Perhaps Mr. Gray was the most learned man in Europe; he was equally acquainted with the elegant and profound parts of science, and that not superficially, but thoroughly. He knew every branch of history both natural and civil; had read all the original historians of England, France, and Italy, and was a great antiquarian. Criticism, metaphysics, morals, politics, made a principal part of his study. Voyages and travels of all sorts were his favorite amusements; and he had a fine taste in painting, prints, architecture, and gardening. With such a fund of knowledge, his conversation must have been equally instructing and entertaining. But he was also a good man, a man of virtue and humanity. There is no character without some speck, some imperfection; and I think the greatest defect in his was an affectation in delicacy, or rather effeminacy, and a visible fastidiousness or contempt and disdain of his inferiors in science. He also had in some degree that weakness which disgusted Voltaire so much in Congreve. Though he seemed to value others chiefly according to the progress they had made in knowledge, yet he could not bear to be considered merely as a man of letters; and though without birth, or fortune, or station, his desire was to be looked upon as a private independent gentleman, who read for his amusement. Perhaps it may be said, What signifies so much knowledge, when it produced so little? Is it worth taking so much pains, to leave no memorials but a few poems? But let it be considered, that Mr. Gray was to others at least innocently employed; to himself, certainly beneficially. His time passed agreeably; he was every day making some new acquisition in science. His mind was enlarged, his heart softened, his virtue strengthened. The world and mankind were shown to him without a mask; and he was taught to consider everything as trifling, and unworthy the attention of a wise man, except the pursuit of knowledge, and practice of virtue, in that state wherein God has placed us.”

Mason remarked, that, excepting pure mathematics and the studies dependent upon that science, there was hardly any part of human learning in which Gray had not acquired a competent skill ; in most of them a consummate mastery. Making some slight allowance for friendly exaggeration, the statement is undoubtedly correct. In profound knowledge of history he was surpassed by no one of his contemporaries, Gibbon alone excepted ; and the latter, though a scholar of marvellous versatility and thoroughness, was probably his inferior in all other branches of learning. The classical fragments in the edition of Mathias bear witness to both the accuracy and the comprehensiveness of his knowledge of the writers of antiquity, and he seems to have combined, in a very unusual degree, the minuteness of a verbal critic with the scope of an independent thinker. His knowledge of architecture — particularly of the British Gothic — was such, that he could at once pronounce on the precise period of the erection of any cathedral, and discriminate accurately the age of its various parts. For the sake of precision, he ventured to add several new terms to the technology of the art. In natural history, zoölogy and botany were his favorite branches, and were diligently prosecuted during the last ten years of his life. He *overset* Linnæus into good Latin, kept an interleaved copy always before him, in which he collected the views of the naturalists of all ages, wrote the most complete treatise on British Insects, patiently watched the growth of flowers, and speculated on the mystery of vegetation. Heraldry, genealogy, and antiquities were never dry to him. Many proofs of his careful research in these branches came to light on the sale of his library. His copy of Dugdale's *Origines*, in folio, now in the British Museum, is filled up in the margin with the arms and descriptions of all the families mentioned. In the words of Mitford : "To him, the genealogical researches of Dugdale were incomplete ; the scientific language of Linnæus imperfect ; and the History of the Chinese Dynasties, in fifteen quarto volumes, by Grosier, needed his verbal corrections, and supplemental improvements, before it was worthy of being enrolled in the archives of Pekin." Walpole testifies that his knowledge of the different schools of painting was exceedingly

accurate, and his taste refined. In music, he was a diligent student of the old Italian masters, and was wont to sing and play upon the harpsichord their reviving strains. He was not only thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of the French and Italian classics, but kept himself always *au courant* with the authors of his own time. He was, as might be supposed, completely versed in the whole course of English literature. He once thought of writing a History of English Poetry from the earliest times, and had already drawn up a general sketch of his plan, when, hearing that Warton was engaged on a similar work, he unfortunately abandoned the project. Even in the science of cookery he was an adept. His copy of Verrol's Book of Cookery, 8vo, 1759, came into Mitford's possession, and was found to be enriched with a very large number of manuscript notes and remarks, showing the most minute diligence and a familiar acquaintance with the principles of gastronomy. Everything was arranged in scientific order, classified under different heads, and carefully indexed to the respective pages. He was never a half-way man; he was not a superficial student in anything. His precept and his practice were to have recourse always to great original authors, to read with a method, and never to throw away time on inferior books. He well knew from experience, he said, how much could be done in this way. He thought that the great increase of dictionaries and encyclopædias was a bad symptom of the literature of the age, as tending to produce superficiality of research. On the whole, it may be said, that but few scholars have surpassed him in general erudition; and that, in the words of Mackintosh, "he deserves the comparatively trifling praise of having been the most learned poet since Milton."

Gray's habits of composition are well worth attention in these days of hurried, slipshod writing. Walpole said that "he was a very slow, but very correct writer." Mason remarked that "Gray's conceptions, as well as his manner of disposing them, were so singularly exact, that he had seldom occasion to make many, except verbal emendations, after he had first committed his lines to paper. It was never his method to sketch his design in careless verse; he always fin-



ished as he proceeded: this, though it made his execution slow, made his compositions more perfect." In a letter to a young poet, he censured, as a great obstacle to poetic expression, the habit of "casting down first thoughts carelessly and at large, and then clipping them here and there at leisure. This method, after all possible pains, will leave behind it a laxity, a diffuseness. The frame of a thought (otherwise well invented, well turned, and well placed) is often weakened by it." He had no faith in genius without work. He rather believed, with Dante (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book II. Ch. IV.), that, even with the greatest gifts of nature, nothing ever "*sine strenuitate ingenii et artis assiduitate scientiarumque habitu fieri potest. . . . Et ideo confiteatur eorum stultitia, qui arte scientiaque immunes, de solo ingenio confidentes ad summa summe canenda prorumpunt, et a tanta presumptuositate desistant.*" So, too, our own great epic master: "Poetry is the art of expert judgment, and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing, with elegant maxims and copious invention."

Socially, Gray was the best and the worst company in the world. Walpole says he was the latter. He disliked general society, and had, as he said, an inability for it, the versatility of his mind having been lost by his long life in the University. With people at all uncongenial, he must have been reserved and dull indeed. Yet with those he liked he was highly entertaining. Dr. Beattie said that his letters and conversation were similar; that he was easy, spontaneous, and communicative, with none of the airs of either a scholar or a poet. Walpole often asserted that "Gray never was a boy," — a phrase which very well indicates his formality and want of elasticity in every-day life, but most uncharacteristic of the sprightliness of his familiar intercourse. The fastidiousness of his manner, according to Mason, "was rather an affectation in delicacy and effeminacy, than the things themselves; and he chose to put on this appearance chiefly before persons whom he did not wish to please." Probably it was with him as with the younger Pitt, who was often blamed for a certain finicalness of manner which he at times assumed in self-defence, — as a barricade against bores. His sensitiveness,

too, unfitted him for coarse pleasantries and an easy footing with all. Even the casual remark of an intimate friend often led him to delay for years, or to abandon wholly, the pet productions of his brain. To criticism of any kind he was in no way partial. To Mason he said: "You know I do not love, much less pique myself on criticism; and think even a bad verse as good a thing or better than the best observation that ever was made upon it." Many of his sportive sallies show a quick eye for the ludicrous, a keen appreciation of character, and the most exquisite humor. Walpole said that "humor was his natural and original turn"; but this side of his nature was so little known to the multitude, that, as Mitford remarks, many of his best sayings have been accredited to Johnson, and enrolled among the Johnsoniana. One of his Latin *bon-mots*, among others, deserves a place with Swift's celebrated joke, "Mantua, vae miseræ nimum vicina Cremonæ!" and Curran's well-known squib, "Quid rides?" As we have never seen it correctly quoted, we will give it. The Rev. Dr. Plumptre was a clergyman known for his comfortable life and numerous "livings." Gray, in a letter to Mason, 1759, writes thus of this "good easy man": "Your friend Dr. Plumptre has lately sat for his picture to Wilson. The motto, in large letters (the measure of which he himself prescribed), is, 'Non magna loquimur, sed vivimus'; i. e. 'We don't say much, but we hold good livings.'" Being asked what sort of a man Dr. Hurd was, he said: "The last person who left off stiff-topped gloves." To those familiar with the personal and literary traits of the prim prelate, the remark gives his whole character in a nut-shell. Of a bore named Pigot, he said, "*Piget*, he Pigot's me." But enough of the Grayiana.

After the death of an acquaintance, Dr. Middleton, in 1750, Gray wrote to Wharton: "For my part, I find a friend so uncommon a thing, that I cannot help regretting even an old acquaintance, which is an indifferent likeness of it." His friends, true and constant, were his books. He could well have adopted what Cicero says of them in the Defence of Archias. They were his incessant companions; they rejoiced with him, solaced his sadder hours, and chimed in with every

mood. Yet learning was not to him a holiday pleasure simply : he made it the duty, the business, of life. In earnest work alone could he find peace for the unrest of his soul. The essence of his life he distilled for us into a few golden words. Whoever will lay them to heart may behold the Happy Valley. "To find one's self business is the great art of life." "To be employed is to be happy." "The secret of happiness is to be constantly employed."

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ART. III.—1. *The History of Mauritius, or the Isle of France, and the neighboring Islands ; from their first Discovery to the present Time ; composed principally from the Papers and Memoirs of* BARON GRANT, *who resided twenty Years in the Island.* By his Son, CHARLES GRANT, Viscount de Vaux. Illustrated with Maps from the best Authorities. London. 1850. pp. 571.

2. *Creoles and Coolies ; or, Five Years in Mauritius.* By the REV. PATRICK BEATON, M. A., Late Minister of St. Andrew's Church, and Secretary of the Bible Society, Mauritius. Second edition. London. 1859. pp. 296.

THE little island described in the books we have named has acquired an importance within the last ten years which leads us to attempt a brief sketch of its history and condition. Like Barbados and Trinidad, it has derived immense wealth from the cultivation of the sugar-cane, and with them it enjoys the pleasant consciousness of a surplus in its treasury. Its history contains much which interests us, as we can here see the practical working of emancipation, and we may perhaps learn to avoid the errors attendant upon all pioneer enterprises.

A glance at the map of the eastern hemisphere shows us the large island of Madagascar, immediately to the eastward of the Cape of Good Hope, and to the eastward of this, three small islands, named Mauritius, Bourbon, and Roderigues.